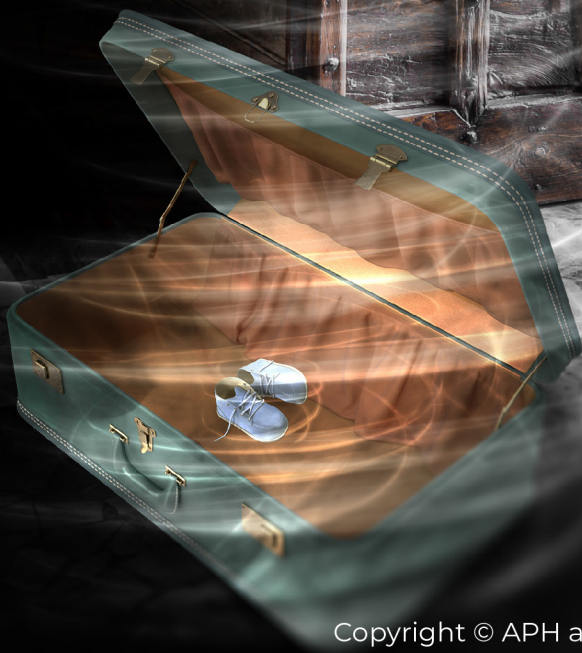


Storyteller: Dr. Rana  
Scenarist: Mina Leila

# THE BABY IN THE SUITCASE



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# **The Baby In The Suitcase**

*Storyteller Dr. Rana*

*Scenarist Mina Leila*



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**APH NO: 22-7-1118EB-CA**

We dedicate this work, which is based on true stories, to the thousands of people, who are deprived of their liberty and who still face persecution in their home country, Turkey. To the innocent people of Anatolia, who had to flee their country, who are separated from their families, and who lost their lives while crossing the Aegean Sea and Maritsa (Evros) River.



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## **Editor's Note**

After the alleged coup attempt of July 15, 2016, thousands of people lost their jobs and were subjected to court trials and proceedings on the grounds that they were Hizmet Movement members. Hundreds of people, who do not have a hope to survive in this grueling atmosphere in Turkey, are striving to leave the country illegally by venturing into the risk of crossing the border and facing death in order to live freely. There were people who drowned in this difficult and harsh journey.

The account you read is a true story, but the real names and places have been changed for the safety of the victim's family.

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this endeavor by preparing the visuals and dealing with the script of the narrative, and during the interview phases. Our sole wish is that the injustice and lawlessness and victimization that many have been suffering from will come to an end as soon as possible by the reestablishment of the rule of law.

## About Hizmet Movement

Hizmet is a transnational civil society initiative that advocates for the ideals of human rights, equal opportunity, democracy, non-violence and the emphatic acceptance of religious and cultural diversity. It began in Turkey as a grassroots community in the 1970s in the context of social challenges being faced at the time: violent conflict among ideologically and politically driven youth, desperate economic conditions and decades of state-imposed ideology of discrimination where the un-elected members of the state penetrated excessively in people's lives and mandated a particular lifestyle.

Over the years, Hizmet has transformed from a grassroots community in Turkey to a wider social effort around the world where participants come from all walks of life — they are culturally, geographically, linguistically and religiously diverse. Their work centers on:

- Promoting philanthropy and community service
- Investing in education for cultivating virtuous individuals
- Organizing intercultural and interfaith dialogue for peaceful coexistence

Hizmet participants are inspired by the ideas, life example and vision of Fethullah Gulen, who advocated for deeper personal spiritual devotion that is expressed in social work through the understanding that serving fellow humans is serving God.

For more information: [www.afsv.org](http://www.afsv.org)

# Introduction

(APH Project – The Project of Recording and Archiving Hizmet Movement Persecution)

Advocates of Silenced Turkey (AST) is a non-governmental organization that runs its activities on a voluntary basis. The aim of AST is to bring before international public opinion the human rights violations including torture and the unlawful court trials and proceedings, which have been encountered in Turkey for the last two years. After the coup attempt of July 15, 2016, more than 160,000 innocent people lost their jobs in both the public and private sectors, with accusations and unjust convictions of being connected with the coup attempt. When the state of emergency administration, which was announced on July 20, 2016, gave the state unlimited authority to combat the terrorist organizations, the fundamental principles of a democratic society and the most basic principles of universal human rights and values such as freedom of expression and freedom of press were devastatingly damaged. Today in Turkey more than 60,000 people from prestigious careers such as soldiers, members of the judiciary, doctors, teachers, journalists and academics, including 16,000 women and nearly 900 children, have been detained and imprisoned.

As Advocates of Silenced Turkey, we engage in a number of activities in order not to keep silent about the injustices that have been taking place in this long period of suspension of law in Turkey.

The project of recording and archiving the testimonies of victims aims to shed light on the injustices suffered by thousands of people in Turkey. Through the endeavors of our volunteers, the victimizations and hardships that the victims experienced have been recorded both in spoken and written forms. The main purpose of this work is to ensure that the victimizations are recorded in an



accurate and impartial manner. Thus future generations may come to learn and comprehend the injustices and the victimizations from firsthand sources. On the other hand, it is a lofty goal to bring the oppressions that the victims in Turkey have been and are exposed to the attention of academics, media organizations, human rights associations, prominent community leaders and government representatives at the international level.

“The Baby in the Suitcase” is the product of a long-term endeavor. Each of our works is the compilation of real life stories encountered by real victims. However, their real names and scenes of events have not been revealed for the safety of the victim’s relatives in Turkey. We would like to thank everyone who made tireless and valuable contributions to this work, and we wish the fundamental values such as the rule of law to be established in Turkey again.

**Editor's note on AST and APH Project**

## *From A Village School To Studying Medicine...*

Hardworking and smart, I was the only child of an Anatolian family of limited means. My father, even as he struggled to make ends meet with the salary of a civil servant, was nonetheless very supportive of my ideals of receiving an education. Thus, I first attended a High School of Sciences where I was a boarding student; afterwards, I moved on to attend one of the most prestigious schools of Medicine in Turkey. I was able to complete my education thanks to the scholarships I was awarded while staying in the dormitory, as well as the great sacrifices my family endured for my sake, despite their already limited means.

I was introduced to the Hizmet Movement when I was at the university. During those years, out of loyalty to those who had come before me, I would tutor and mentor high school students. Later on, during the time I was working as an assistant in the university, I would do my best to be of support to the next generations who were going down the same paths that I had previously traveled.

I met my future husband two years before graduation. He, too, was a person who had devoted himself to the Hizmet Movement. However, it was not through the Hizmet Movement that we were introduced to each other. We were actually both students in the same department and our paths ended up crossing at one point. Right after graduation, my husband (who, at the time, was my fiancé) went back to his hometown for mandatory military service. I, too, decided to go back to my hometown, since I had been away from my family for years.

I wanted to live with my family for a while, really feeling their presence close by me.

Two years later, after my husband-to-be had selected his specialty and settled in Ankara, we were married. In September 2011, I started my PhD studies; it was also the year I became a married woman. Though my husband and I were both part of the circle of "academia," I can say that we were far from working with the genuinely intellectual people that we would have expected. People would smile to each other and greet one another when met face to face but would start gossiping about one another the minute they turned their backs. They would argue over the most basic things. Which is why we opted to keep our distance from them and chose to keep quiet about our love for the Hizmet Movement. As a matter of fact, the Hizmet/government tensions which would arise a short while later proved how wise our decision had been. As the targeting and pressures increased over time, we started distancing ourselves from others even more.

I had a very close friend, Fidan, who was also married. Fidan and her husband were the only couple we would meet with on a regular basis. They, too, were doctors like us, and we shared the same thoughts and feelings about the Hizmet Movement and, interestingly, we had both gotten married around the same time. We were both trying to conceive a child and were receiving medical care for this. It seemed like we were companions in a shared destiny. (As a matter of fact, following the coup attempt in Turkey, which would strike later on, it was around the same time frame that both she and I were reported to the authorities and were taken into custody.).

## *Going On Vacation To Stage A Coup (!)*

In mid-July 2016, there was a coup attempt in Turkey, and the accusation of responsibility for the coup was thrown on the volunteers/members of the Hizmet Movement. However, as those who remember those days know very well, it was right after the Ramadan Eid and, like all regular citizens, the people who were being accused of staging the coup were away either visiting family in their hometowns or — like us — were on vacation. No one even bothered asking the question: “Well, if these people were truly planning on staging a coup, why didn't they stay in the cities they lived in and take active part in carrying out the planned coup?” The accusations were allegations without any sort of basis...

It was precisely during this time that my husband and I were vacationing at a hotel in a coastal town on the Mediterranean. We were scheduled to return to Ankara the next day to go back to our jobs, and we were hanging out chatting in the hotel lobby, enjoying our last night of vacation. I remember the television running in the background, but we were so immersed in our own conversation that we weren't even paying attention to what was on... That is, until 11 o'clock that night when we received a phone call from a friend in Ankara. As we spoke on the phone, there was the sound of jet planes in the background coming from her end of the phone. Interestingly, she too hadn't heard anything about the coup attempt. As we continued to converse, the sounds got louder and louder. Confused, we finally had to hang up because we couldn't hear each other over the noise.

What on earth was happening? We turned around to tune in to the television behind us. The TV channels were talking about something related to a coup; there were jets racing through the skies, there was some news about the Parliament building being bombed — personally, as God is my witness — I worryingly thought to myself, "I bet it's some disagreement with some foreign country and they've opened fire." After a while, because we were going to be hitting the road early the next morning, we went up to our room to get some sleep.

The following morning, we drove back to Ankara and because all the major roads were closed off entering Ankara, we were only able to reach our home using completely different routes to get there. Of course, we were still not fully aware of the gravity of the situation. We were, however, going to become quite aware a couple of days later when we returned to work. On my first day back, my professor received a notice for his dismissal. I cannot forget that day when an armful of yellow envelopes arrived at the department. The people whose names were written on those envelopes learned later that they had just been suspended. Eventually, all those individuals were dismissed from their jobs. This incident shook our department like a bomb.

"Serves him right!" the people remarked about my professor after he had been sent away. Whereas just prior to him being taken away like that, he had been loved and respected by all, known throughout the department to be a professor who did his job well, a man who everyone wanted to work with. Like I mentioned before, our department was full of characterless individuals, and they started gossiping about him before he even had a chance to exit the room. In the following days, there was an air of distrust hanging over our department, and tensions kept increasing by the minute as everyone looked to one another with suspicion, viewing each other as potential informants. In fact, professors from other departments were even sending their assistants over to me to try and pry out any kind of information...

## *Being Made To Pay The Price For The Coup!*

The following year passed by with us watching in desperation as numbers upon numbers of innocent Hizmet Movement members were being arrested one by one, some being killed through torture, and others being left to suffer through dire conditions both physically and psychologically... Nevertheless, our own lives were continuing on, and even though we were upset and dispirited, we carried on going to work and doing our jobs as was necessary. The gravity of the year 2016 turned out to be a preview, however, of how tough the coming year was going to be.

Despite everything, 2017 did bring us something beautiful — our first baby. It was the beginning of August when our baby came into this world. The treatments had proved fruitful, and our Lord had, in the end, blessed us with a child. As happy as I was about this, a part of me was still deeply troubled with the current state of the country, as well as the fact that my dear friend Fidan (whom had been going through the same treatments as us) was not able to bear any children.

Our baby was forty days old, I was more or less over the initial postpartum exhaustion, and I thought, "It's summertime, why don't we go and visit family and introduce them to our new baby!" And so we traveled to our hometown where we visited with family for a couple of days. Afterwards, my husband went back to Ankara to his job, while the baby and I stayed behind for a while longer... That was our initial plan, at least...

I should begin this part with a small explanation. Back home we have a note next to our front door that reads: "Attention! Baby is sleeping, please do not ring doorbell." Which means that ever since our baby arrived, our doorbell had not rung once. However, the morning after my husband made it back home, he was awakened by the endless ringing of our doorbell, which to him was quite a shock. A second shock was when he opened the door to be greeted by the police officers asking for my whereabouts!

Being arrested is one thing, but even just the fact that your home is raided by the police and searched inside out is in itself so offensive and embarrassing... Just imagine, there may be things that you keep secret and private even from your own family, but then, here you are, being accused of actions you did not even commit and these complete strangers come in and pillage every single corner of your private residence. Thank God that at least when my husband excused himself to go into the study to get dressed, he was able to think to hide away our passports...

There was a lady we attended religious study circles with, and, who knows, maybe it was because she was forced into it and maybe she felt she had no other choice — I don't know what the reason was — but it was she that reported me and my close friend Fidan to the police. My husband didn't tell me about this at the time, but he had spoken about it to my mother. But, he did call me up to say, "If for some reason they issue a search warrant for you, you need to give power of attorney to a lawyer ahead of time, just in case." He thought he had come up with a plan in case I were to get caught, but how was he to know that this would also be the plan that would drive me right into trouble...

I hadn't quite understood why my husband was asking me to get a power-of-attorney. We were already feeling suffocated by the country's current agenda, and we were making preparations to exit the country — legally — in the near future, so why the sudden need for a power-of-attorney now? Still, I did not insist otherwise, and my mother and I found ourselves at the notary. We

went to the notary for a quick power-of-attorney procedure... that's all it was... or so we thought... but... They started asking me all sorts of irrelevant questions. I started thinking to myself, "Isn't this taking a bit too long? No, no, stop worrying for nothing. This is a comprehensive power-of-attorney you're going after, it's completely normal for it to take this long... etc..." Just then, the young gentleman standing next to me caught my attention. I turned towards him, and we made eye contact. "Are you Ms. Rana?" he asked. "Yes, but..," I started saying... as his cold words cut me off. "There is a search warrant for you. I have orders to take you away." I froze — I had absolutely no idea how I should respond. For a split second, I looked behind me towards the door, and there stood a group of civil police who had come to take me. The young police officer started interrogating me as we stood there: "Why do you think there is a search warrant for you?" "I have no idea" I said. "I've never had any problems with anyone to this day." To be honest, just at that moment, I can't say that one of the assistants at the university hospital did not cross my mind. After my professor had been dismissed, she had constantly been picking on me. Grilling me many times, pressuring me, harassing me, asking me things like, "Admit it, are you one of them? Are you a FETO member?!" (The term 'FETO' is a fabricated label by the Turkish Government to categorize the sympathizers of Fetullah Gülen. It is a scare tactic serving multiple functions; namely to create division and implant fear in the eyes of the Turkish population as well as the rest of the world. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has thrown the name around for every problem in Turkey, much as how Hitler had blamed the Jews for everything. 'FETO' is the ever serving scapegoat for an uprising dictator, the real threat to a peaceful and successful Turkey.

....

My baby was crying incessantly, the police were standing there waiting to take me, my mother was looking around with terror in her eyes, and the people standing nearby were watching us with curiosity. And I was in shock... I was in shock, and I had no choice but to do as I was told.



Because the report had been issued in Ankara, they told me that my testimony would be taken by the public prosecutor there. However, because the prosecutor did not accept SEGBIS (Audio-Visual Information System), it was decided that I would be physically delivered to Ankara. My husband and my mother were there to accompany me — that is, they followed behind the police car that was taking me. I was being delivered under the supervision of three police officers, one being a woman, and my family followed behind as the police car started moving. The local prosecutor was, thank God, conscientious enough to let me ride without being cuffed. In fact, he had even given the orders, "Let her nurse her baby whenever she wishes to."

It was a three-and-a-half hour drive to Ankara, and I was being taken in a vehicle which traveled with no consideration of the traffic codes whatsoever. I was constantly looking back to see the car that my husband was following us in. So long as I could see him coming behind us, I felt I was safe.

We stopped once to nurse my baby. We were now pretty close to Ankara, when we stopped at a nearby rest area, and the police told me to eat something. They were probably thinking that I should eat and not be hungry in case I was arrested later on. My husband and I sat at a table while they sat at another table close by.

My husband was trying to comfort me, but I could see the terror in his eyes. "Don't be upset," he said. We have the law and justice on our side, you have a tiny baby, they won't arrest you." He told me he would get a lawyer and that I needn't worry. Even as he was telling me not to worry, he was so worried himself that I couldn't relax either. He was speaking to me as though we were bidding farewell... As we got back on the road, I had the notion to look at my phone. I had considered leaving it at home, but the prosecutor and the police officers had told me to make sure that I carried it with me. Quite possibly they figured the prosecutor in Ankara would take hold of it for examination. I had a very close friend who had learned from my mother that I had been taken into

custody, and that we were on the road. Because she could not write to me, she would write whatever she wanted to say to me as a WhatsApp message and would delete it when she figured I had read it. First she wrote, "Don't worry, all this will pass." Then she wrote, "Go back to the factory settings!" That's when the penny dropped. They were going to put my phone in for examination and, judging by the fact that I was being held under custody even when I had done absolutely nothing wrong, they could very well also concoct some kind of crime from even the most insignificant message they were to find. I immediately did what she told me and reset the phone to its factory settings.

## *“We Set Up A Space For Your Baby In The Detention Room!”*

Sometime before being taken into custody, I had a dream: I passed by places that seemed to be deserted, with no one around, in complete isolation, and I entered a gray building. Inside, everything had a reddish tone to it, I climbed a narrow set of stairs, and I half opened the door to a room. I saw sacrificial meat inside the room... At the time I had the dream, I had tried hard to find a positive meaning from the dream, but it was now that the meaning of the dream seemed much more clear to me. Perhaps, through this dream, my Lord had shown me the hundreds of victims (sacrifices) that had been locked up in those gray buildings (the judicial buildings)...

When I saw the military building (yes, I had been brought to the military quarters instead of the police station) that I was being delivered to by the police, a shiver ran down my spine. This building looked so much like the building I saw in my dream! A gray building with very narrow staircases. As I was escorted up those stairs and into a room, I can't say that I didn't half expect that there would be sacrificial meat hanging down from the ceiling as I walked into the room...

It was almost midnight... The commander on call greeted us when we arrived; he was a polite man. In fact, he told me I could bring my baby with me and that they had prepared a special place for the baby. For a second, I acted pretty naively and fell for it, calling my husband to ask him, “What should we do?” Thank God, he acted with a more sound mind and pretty much said to me, “Don't be absurd!” Of course he was right, but this was the first time I would be separated from my baby, and I felt uneasy and upset. I had merely thought,

*“We Set Up A Space For Your Baby In The Detention Room!”*

well, since the conditions are favorable, and they've already set up a spot, let my baby stay with me.

In a few minutes, I would see for myself how special the spot was that they had set up for us... a bed of concrete, a metal toilet, a space barely ten square feet that was dark and reeked of sewage so intensely that you could feel your liver burning. Oh, and how that commander had pressured me, saying, “I can't let the baby in and out all the time; either the baby stays with you or doesn't come in at all.” After I was locked up there, I was grateful that I hadn't brought in my baby with me. Either that commander did not have any children of his own or he just didn't have an ounce of compassion in him.

They emptied out my pockets and took away my phone, personal belongings, even my shoe laces. I was escorted down that narrow staircase and into that tiny dark place, as if I were being placed in my grave. Room upon rooms of iron standing next to one another. As I was passing by, I caught a glimpse of who was in the first detention room — my dear friend Fidan. They had gotten hold of her before they'd come to me and had already locked her up. She probably saw me passing through, but she didn't even look up at me. No greeting, no looking up, not even a nod... On top of everything else, here, too, was another upsetting blow.

As the iron door closed down on, me, the night was just beginning. Everything here was bad, but the worst part was the fact that there was no clock anywhere. There was a digital clock hanging above, but the time it displayed didn't make any sense, and finally when that clock stopped working altogether, it felt like time had come to a complete halt. It was a tight space that felt like a grave... as though we had been locked up in there to start accounting for our lives and selves...

I sat... I stood... I paced... I lay down... What felt to me like centuries going by was probably just a ten minute time frame. What's more, as the hours stretched on, another problem-arose. Being that I was a mother who had newly

given birth and had been nursing, my breasts started to become swollen, and I was in pain. If they could at least give me some pain relievers, if only my pain could be quieted down somewhat... I called out, I yelled... Nobody answered my calls. I made foolish hand gestures towards the camera waiting for someone to notice, but still no one came. Finally, I heard a faint voice, both familiar and not... It was my friend, my friend in the detention room next to me, and she was speaking in an icy tone of voice so as not to give away our relationship. She said to me, "There's a red button there, you need to push that!" I did as she told me. I pressed and pressed the button countless times but no one came. I was up all night until the next morning, trembling with pain. I had to express my milk into the filthy toilet, the milk dripping all over my clothes... "At least give me a napkin!" I whimpered. "Please anybody, somebody help me please!" My throat had dried up from all the calls and screams... Helpless and exhausted, I asked for a drop of water, but still no one came. Left with no other choice, I drank the filthy water from the toilet...

How I made it into the morning that night? I do not know, but somehow I did. It wasn't the early morning hours, maybe more towards noon, when finally the sun shone down on my detention room. A soldier carrying a red car seat brought me my baby. It felt like I hadn't seen my baby in months. I jumped up and caught hold of the car seat and hugged and hugged my baby, kissing him, smelling him, taking him all in... And of course I nursed him... My baby wasn't even two months old yet, he was just learning to smile and he smiled up at me and I smiled back. I spoke to him. I said, "You, my precious baby, you do not belong here... I promise you, we are going to get out of here, we will be free and we will never have to leave one another.." He smiled as though he understood me, and I smiled back even more.

By the time I changed my baby, nursed him and talked to him, it had been over an hour already, and because I couldn't allow my baby to be in those filthy conditions any longer, I pressed the red button and called for the soldier to come

and take him back. As the soldier took my baby away, I couldn't stop the tears from rolling down my cheeks. This separation was just too much to bear...

I learned later on that it was my mother and brother-in-law who had brought the baby to me, not my husband. The officials had insistently been asking him over and over, "You will be coming tomorrow, is that right?" And so, afraid that they would also take him, he had decided against coming to the station himself.

Not long after I parted with my baby, they took me to the hospital and then over to the police station to give a statement. While I was giving a statement they asked me so many questions and made all kinds of accusations. Of course, I did not consent to any of these accusations. Afterwards, I was shown a catalog full of pictures and was asked which of the individuals I personally knew. "None of them," I replied. Indeed, I did not know any of the individuals I was shown. Was I tensed up as I was being questioned? No. I had been through such a lonely and terrible night that, to be honest, I was just happy to be outside again and to be able to have a conversation with another human being (even if it was just to give a statement).

The lawyer my husband had engaged was also there with me. He tried to comfort me, "Don't worry," he said, "I will do everything I possibly can. You will make it out of this hole and, God-willing, you will go someplace far away and you will be free." I desperately needed to hear such words... Unfortunately, though, they ended up taking me back to that small, cramped, and dark place once again...

*"If You Do Not Want To Raise Your Baby Behind Bars,  
Confess! Confess Everything, Save Yourself!"*

I cannot imagine how people could endure this for days, months, even years, because I was certainly about to lose my mind. How was I going to make it to the morning in this hole! Interrupting my thoughts just then, a soldier came to take me away. Even though I had already given my official testimony, I was being taken again — this time to give another, unofficial testimony...

Waiting for me in the interrogation room was a commander along with a well-dressed man who introduced himself as Anil. I figured out later that this man was an expert trained in the psychology of persuasion. He started a conversation with me: "So, your father was a poor man, sending you to school despite his limited means. Your father must've gone through some pretty difficult times just so you could receive an education, isn't that right? You are an intelligent young woman, you don't deserve to be here... You also have a small baby, don't you?" Supposedly, he, too, had a small baby girl of his own. He told me that once, when he was out on assignment, he had had to be away from her for days and, "oh, how difficult it had been." And what about me? What on earth would I do without my baby, all cooped up in this tiny hole? Let's say I brought my baby here with me, was a prison ward the best place to raise a tiny baby? How could a smart woman like me to do that to her baby? In short, the man was using my motherhood as a weapon against me to try and get me to "confess"... He finished off his words with this sentence: "You can't take offence at the government, it is never too late to make amends. Confess to what you know, save yourself!"

*"If You Do Not Want To Raise Your Baby Behind Bars, Confess! Confess Everything, Save Yourself!"*

Being a doctor, I also had received education on 'Psychology and Body Language,' and I could easily figure out what the man was trying to do. I chose not to resist; I listened to what he had to say until the very end. I knew very well that anything I were to say would be used as evidence against me. Also, rather than going back into that dark cell, I saw no harm in extending the conversation a bit more. Naturally, he saw my silence as concession and figured he was on the right track. He continued to 'sweet talk' (!) me for about an hour and a half. When he was done talking, he finally spilled the beans, saying, "How about we send for your attorney, would you like to go over your testimony once again?"

Again, rather than having to go back into that dark cell, I chose the option to chat with my lawyer for a while. I accepted the offer. While he was enjoying the notion that he had won me over, I, on the other hand, was happy to have the chance to meet once more with my lawyer. When summoned back in the evening of the same day, my lawyer — thinking that I had become one of the "concessioners" — had initially been a bit anxious; when he realized what was really going on, though, he was relieved. He personally didn't have any connection with the Hizmet Movement; however, he was greatly bothered by all the injustice being committed. "You have a strong case," he told me. "Your baby is so little, at least they will postpone your trial, release you with a pending trial.. This will buy you some time to be able to make it out of the country. "

A short while later, I was taken in to be interrogated once again. My lawyer advised me: "Do not say anything! Just start crying and say, 'I don't know anything, I only want to be with my baby.' Cry out, 'I beg of you, please bring my baby, I miss him so much!'" Okay, but I couldn't possibly put on an act like that! "You don't need to put on an act anyway," he said. "Just think about the fact that you are being put in prison and being separated from your baby!"

And, indeed, like he said, I did not need to put on a show at all. The man named Anil had already left, but this time, the commander who had only



watched — without talking — during the previous interrogation, was standing there in the room. The second I thought about my baby, I burst into tears. This one must have been more conscientious than the other because once I started crying, he did not insist on anything and let me be. It was Thursday night. I had a court hearing scheduled for the next day. In other words, it would be a Friday, and if my testimony wasn't taken then, I would have to stay there over the weekend. Even the thought of it was driving me crazy...

In the morning, Fidan and I were both loaded into a vehicle. There were three other police officers aboard the vehicle, two in the front, one in the back. My closest friend and I had spent two days in the same hellish place, right next to each other, but we had barely spoken a word to one another. We did not talk then either, we just exchanged, "May this pass soon" greetings, like two strangers. We did not speak to each other, because we figured that the police officers were especially putting us together, trying to open up a hot topic and trying to figure out whether we knew each other or not. We neither deliberately averted our eyes from one another, nor did we show any signs that we knew each other. We behaved in the same fashion any two newly acquainted individuals who had been detained for the same reasons would behave and converse.

First, we went to the hospital, and from there, after dodging a possibly horrible accident by a hairbreadth thanks (!) to the police officers' crazy driving and not paying attention to the traffic codes, we arrived at the courthouse. Interestingly, the police officers who had just a minute ago been chit-chatting with us on the drive over, all of a sudden grew serious and slid the handcuffs over our wrists. In all honesty, this wasn't something done to us specifically; anyone who was being arrested for the same ridiculous reasons was subject to the same treatment. Such were the orders. The purpose was to both create an image that "these people are criminals/terrorists" and to also dishearten the

close family members who were waiting with high hopes at the doors of the courthouse. And, without a doubt, they were fulfilling their purpose.

I was a doctor. By taking the 'Hippocratic Oath' when first starting this profession, I was vowing that I would dedicate my life to helping others live; and yet, at that very moment, I was sitting across from the prosecutor and being accused of having initiated a coup attempt where blood was spilled. As if that were not enough, that prosecutor, through 'the power' given to him not by the *law* but by a political authority, was accusing me of “not being a good mother and not considering the well being of my small baby.” How could I ever do such a thing?! He was telling me that, “He too had a small baby and would do anything for her!” I was subject to these accusations for a whole ninety minutes. I calmly told him that I was in fact thinking about my baby, and that I was deeply upset and hurt. But I did not know anything regarding the information they were looking for and therefore did not have anything to tell him.

Interestingly, as my testimony was being taken, my attorney was there with me; however, he did not intervene at all. I learned the reason for that later on. My attorney's previous client had also been an innocent victim who was being detained for "FETO" accusations, and — under the Erdogan dictatorship — the act of “advocating” for us was itself considered a criminal act. Therefore, my attorney did not want to be seen as being too defensive on my behalf. Another reason was that right before the interrogation, he had been summoned by the prosecutor and been pressured to “push me into confession,” and he was given no other choice than to say that he would do everything he could to make that happen. Thus, he was unable to back me up during the testimony.

I had been inside the prosecutor's office for an hour and a half straight, giving my testimony, and I was drained of all energy. Honestly, when I stepped out of the room I had practically no hope left of being released. The prosecutor's room was separated from the corridor by a glass screen; as we had stood in

there waiting to give the testimony, I saw my father-in-law and brother-in-law down the hall looking in my direction. Naturally, wanting to avoid any possible arrests, my husband was not able to come. My brother-in-law was trying to make me smile from where he stood in the hallway, but I couldn't bring myself to even fake it. When I looked in their direction I tried to smile, and I tried to imagine I was exiting the building as a free woman, leaving with them and going home; but, as soon as I turned back, I would see the prosecutor, and I would come face to face with reality once again.

As I was waiting in front of the courtroom — under police supervision — with my brother-in-law and father-in-law, my dear friend Fidan came with her husband, and they also sat down to wait. At one point, I glanced over in their direction. They were chatting and laughing as though they had somehow sensed that she was going to be charged. It was as if they were, in a sense, saying goodbye to each other. At that moment, she appeared to have fully submitted herself to whatever was awaiting her, like she was saying, "Whatever comes from You, o Lord, I accept it with all my being." No doubt about it, I was not as strong as she was. Maybe it was because I had a small baby, and I was being overly sensitive, I don't know, but I felt in need of even just a small fraction of hope to keep me going.

As we stood there, the court personnel went off to noon break. As the ushers were leaving, my attorney felt the need to walk up and ask, "What time will you resume?" The ushers took a look at me and asked, "Isn't yours the case that's being released?" As much as this statement gave us some hope, it also goes to show us exactly where justice stood in the country. Even the ushers were somehow informed about the decision of a case well before the hearing was even held. The hearing did not even last ten minutes. I told the judge that I did not accept any of the accusations against me, and the moment I heard him

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Everything, Save Yourself!"*

say, "...shall be released under judicial control with no signature duty," I have to admit, I was relieved beyond words.

I was pleased, but was I bursting with happiness? Not so much, unfortunately. As I was leaving, I witnessed my dear friend Fidan saying goodbye to her husband as she was being taken to prison. About a year later, I heard that her husband, too, had been arrested and taken to prison. When you're not able to be with your loved ones as you wish, even the most joyful times don't feel so joyful anymore...

My own wish, on the other hand, had come true — I was returning home with my brother-in-law and father-in-law — but there was a certain bitter sweetness to it. As we drove in the car, first we passed by our old house, then the building which was now my 'former' workplace, and the house I came into as a bride, the place where I spent the happiest days of my life. And oh, my workplace... how excited and happy I had been when I first started. We passed the place where I got coffee when I walked to work in the mornings... I remembered how I had taken refuge in that little shop as the rain started pouring on me one day... I came to realize how I had built a world around me, consisting of my social life and my career. Just as the world itself, all that 'life' around me had been a fleeting lie... And now, here I was, riding along in a car, bidding farewell to it all through mournful, teary eyes...

...

Thank God, I was free now, but there was no guarantee that we wouldn't be taken in the next day with another ridiculous accusation. That's why the only thing we wanted to do was to get out of this country. However, we did have one problem, my husband and I — we both had Green Passports, (**Green Passport** (**Turkish**: Yeşil pasaport) allows the bearer to travel visa-free to some countries. As opposed to the regular **passport**, it is exempt from the **passport** fee and is

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only subject to the booklet fee (TRY133.50 [c.]) but our baby wasn't given a Green Passport, so we had to issue a regular passport for him. Because of that, we couldn't travel to Europe without first getting him a visa. We thought, "If we go to the American Consulate, the Turkish police will be there and they will get suspicious." We couldn't go there, so we decided to make an application with the Canadian Consulate. My husband mailed out the documents that we had put together.

Meanwhile, there was another issue which was quite alarming — or fear of being arrested, my husband couldn't stay in his own home, and so, because my baby and I were alone in the house, my mother was staying with us. My husband was staying with a relative of his and could only come out secretly once in awhile to come see us. I was scared out of my mind that someone would follow him and report him to the police. I was being filled in on all that was going on outside — through a visiting friend from work — and I was worried and anxious.

The more inclined we were to hurry things up and get away as soon as possible, the slower things seemed to move forward. It took nearly a month and a half for us to hear back from the Canadian Consulate. And it turned out to be a denial anyway... We had only one last resort left — leaving the country with the help of smugglers!

## *“You Have To Put The Baby In The Suitcase!”*

We had already previously contacted the smugglers and had found some people who would help us escape through Georgia. My mother, mother-in-law, and my husband's cousin joined us as we boarded a plane and flew into Trabzon, our first stop in our escape. It was in the very early hours of the day. Without wasting any time, we rented a car and drove to Hopa, a city in northeastern Turkey close to the Georgia border. From there, we were all together going to pass over to Georgia — that was our plan...

We arrived in Hopa towards noon, and we had to somehow spend the rest of the day at a tea garden, waiting for night to settle, a tea garden by the sea and by the border. Actually, it was a parking lot, a cafe, and a mosque, all standing next to one another in the same area. We parked our car in the parking lot and went back and forth between the mosque and the cafe until it was nighttime... We were already on edge, and to top it off, the weather was cloudy, the sea was crashing with waves and the rocky cliffs seemed to gloom over us, suffocating us even more so. It wasn't called the "Sarp (meaning *steep*) Border" for nothing...

Time stood still, the hours seemed to go on forever. Emotionally, none of us were in the "we are going away for real" state. We were feeling incredibly tense and there was a "let's just get this over with as best as we can " feeling in the air... Finally, the news we had all been waiting for — we were going to cross all together, and one of would be holding the baby. We were only allowed one backpack, so it would look like we were tourists. There was a tremendous stress weighing down on each one of us. As the guides gave us directives with such serious expressions, we grew even more tense by the minute.

We were just about to head out when one of the smugglers dropped an unexpected bomb on us — we had to put the baby in a suitcase! "Absolutely not!" I objected. The baby was so tiny, what on earth would become of him if we put him in a suitcase?! He would suffocate, he wouldn't be able to breathe! "You have no other choice!" said the man. "Either you follow directions or you forget the whole thing!" What an incredibly difficult decision this was for us to make — especially for me, his mother. What if he cried?! What if he couldn't breathe?! What if he suffocated?! We were going through all this horrific adventure for his sake, and if we were to just lose him like that, then what would be the point?! On the other hand, we had come all this way and gone through all this trouble and now, deciding to not go through with it would mean that we were ready to accept all the possible outcomes that would come with that decision. Within seconds so many scenarios ran through my head: "If I end up in prison, how will I be able to raise my baby?.. Either he'll be deprived of sunlight and fresh air or we'll have to be separated for God knows how long... 'I won't be able to hear him say 'mommy'... I won't be able to watch him start crawling and take his first steps.'" We had no other choice — we were desperate, so we accepted the man's conditions, but we felt miserable beyond description. "How are we going to go about doing it?" we asked him. "You're going to sleep-drug the baby," he replied. 'What! He's too tiny to be given any drugs!' I burst out. I couldn't keep a cool head anymore, the doctor side of me was gone, and the mother side of me had taken over. I was crying inconsolably. We thought about giving the baby the lightest drug possible which would not harm him, but we were so overwrought, it's like our brains weren't operating. At last, I called up a doctor friend of mine and asked for advice.

My friend gave me the name of an allergy medicine for babies, one of its side effects was that it triggered sleep. We went and bought the medicine but had no idea how much of it we should give the baby. This much or that much — we finally decided on giving him one unit. And we ended up spilling half of it when giving it to the baby because our hands were shaking so hard.

Fortunately, the baby finally fell asleep without much trouble, probably since he hadn't slept at all during the day with all the running around we did. We figured out later on that the dose we gave the baby had been too little and thus couldn't have produced any side effects, which means the baby had just naturally fallen asleep. He had slept because of exhaustion but we just didn't know that at the time. It's a good thing that we didn't...

It was now time to put the baby in the suitcase. No one could bring themselves to do it, we all wanted to pass the horrible task over to someone else. I was circling around the car, sobbing and crying, "We can't do this!" Neither I nor my husband could work up the courage to put our son inside a suitcase. It was too hard to bear, I couldn't even look in that direction. At that moment, it was such a blessing that my mother was such a cool-headed woman; as I was crying outside the car, she calmly placed our baby in a small hand bag. My chest was pounding so hard I thought I would burst...

It was time to pass through the border, and it was going to be the most difficult part yet. The man had said, "Let the mother carry the handbag," but I couldn't bring myself to do it. On the one hand, as the baby's mother, I thought, "I am the one that can best tend to my baby." I didn't want to put him in anyone else's trust; yet, on the other hand, I couldn't keep calm. Seeing my meltdown, the man decided that my husband could carry the bag after all.

...

The cafe had long closed up, and all of a sudden, there were gypsies everywhere. They were all dressed in wide, loose clothing. We learned that they were carrying stuff underneath their clothes; in other words, they were smugglers. Because inspection was low during the night hours, they had picked this time frame to pass through.

My husband passed through first. As he proceeded with the handbag in his hands, we said prayers after him, but I couldn't sit still, my heart was



pounding out of my chest. My husband's cousin was trying to engage me in conversation and divert my attention, but my mind was fixed on my baby. The two mothers were sitting in the back, crying, and I was with the cousin, pacing to and fro. Seconds stretched on like hours...

Finally, we received a call from my husband — they had made it through! Just as I was about to rejoice, a horrible scenario ran through my mind: "What if I can't make it through?! What if this was the last time I saw them both?!" I tried to calm myself down — I told myself that at least he's with his father. and they have their freedom — but still, a part of me was burning inside...

Now it was my turn to pass. As I walked over towards security, I was still trying to calm myself down, telling myself, "If you want to reunite with your husband and baby you have to calm down, don't let them see how tense you are." I was trying to think about other things, happy thoughts and happy days to come. As my turn approached, I could feel my heart pounding in my throat... It was just like in the movies, everything and everyone around me had fallen silent; there was only a constant hum in the background.

Finally... The police officer was now looking over my passport. He could say, "Come with me to the office;" he could say, "Step over to the side;" he could say anything at all... But all he said was, "Go." Oh thank God, thank God! I walked and kept on going. I walked through a dark corridor (there was construction going on) and came out the other end. And there was my husband, sitting with our baby in his arms. I cannot find the words to describe my joy at that moment. Afterwards, together, we walked over to the Georgian checkpoint. As we passed through, we were setting sail for a whole new life. Our mothers came after us.

Thus began the couple of months we would be spending in our neighbor country. The first thing we did was to check into a hotel. However, because the hotels there are generally used for prostitution, it was filthy beyond belief. And, supposedly, we had been set up with the cleanest hotel possible.

## *Taking A Georgia 'Break' On The Road To Our Future!*

After staying for five days at the hotel in Batum, we went on to Tbilisi. That's where the American Consulate was located. We figured they'd give us a visa immediately, and we'd be on our way. Unfortunately, things didn't go as we planned. Because our baby didn't have a Green passport, we were unable to enter into Europe. Because we didn't have a residency permit in Georgia, the American Consulate wouldn't even schedule an appointment for a visa interview. We had rented a home from Airbnb for fifteen days, but it seemed like we were going to be stuck in this country forever. We tried thinking of alternative ways of making it out. When we realized it wasn't going to be as easy as we had imagined, out of necessity we rented a home in a community where many Turkish people were already living. In fact, there were a couple of other families living there that were in transition, just as we were. Meanwhile, we were still trying to figure out a way to make it to any European country. We paid some money to a lady who owned an agency for her to issue a Lithuanian visa for us, but we soon realized we had been swindled when the money disappeared into thin air.

Meanwhile, refusing to lose hope, my husband would check the American Consulate website every single day, wishfully thinking, "Maybe we can at least get an appointment this time." It was mid-December, as I remember, and it had been about a month and a half since we'd crossed over to Georgia. One evening — as usual — my husband popped on the website to check. We were able to get in this time! We couldn't believe our eyes! Without wasting a second, we made an urgent request for a visa. It was a Tuesday, and they gave us an

appointment for Thursday. We were both tense as we went to the Consulate on the day of the interview, but the event invitation Harvard University had sent my husband was going to make everything easier. Thank God, at the end of the interview we were granted the visa!! Only those who have lived through the same experience can understand the kind of joy we felt that day.

Though we had only stayed in the community we were then living for about a month and a half, we had made great friends there. We were fifteen families now, and we all shared the same fate. They were so happy for us when they heard that we'd gotten our visas, but, of course, they were also so sad... these would be our final days in that country. Our last evening together with our friends was so wonderful and so full of sorrow at the same time. They had organized a mini farewell for us — everyone had cooked a dish and brought us gifts. Despite their limited means and the fact that they were all going through hard times, these beautiful and humble people had each brought us something special as a parting gift. We squeezed each one of those gifts into our suitcase to bring them with us, and to this day, we have them displayed in the most special part of our home. Those small but meaningful gifts will forever be cherished in our home to remind us of that time in our lives, a time of both hope and sorrow.

On the day we were set to begin our voyage, we first sent our mothers back to Turkey. This was by far not an easy thing to do.. No matter how much they wished for us to seek our freedom, we had grown so attached to one another in this one and a half month period that we had been living together. After seeing them off, it was time for us to make it to our own flight. Everything was going smoothly up until the check-in, when we found ourselves face to face with the meaningless obstinacy of the officer there. The officer, whose only duty was to "check-in" the passengers, refused to let us board the plane! Supposedly, the reason was because others who had previously traveled from Georgia to Germany had applied for asylum there. We objected, saying, "How does this concern you? That's their problem, isn't it?" but the officer refused to

listen. The man did not let us board the plane. He kept on insisting, "Let me buy you a ticket through Istanbul and you can travel anywhere you want from there." Another man individual who also carried a Green passport like us, was held from boarding the plane as well. In the end, neither that person, nor we were able to fly to Germany.

...

Though unable to board the German flight that morning at 5 a.m, we were somehow still able to buy a ticket to Ukraine and boarded the plane that same evening, exactly twelve hours later, at 5 p.m. Well taken care of with the snacks that our new and forever friends in Georgia had packed for us, we had a four hour flight and landed in Kiev. From there, with no more problems to hold us back, we connected to our other flight and flew to New York.

## *“Where To Call Home?”*

Finally, we had landed in the New York City JFK airport and reached our final destination, safe and sound. We stayed at a friend's house in New York for ten days, during which time we had the opportunity to think things through: “Should we stay here in United States of America or not?” We had a small baby and big financial limitations. Whatever little we had, we had to use it wisely and frugally. We did our research and looked around. In the end, Canada seemed to make the most sense for us in terms of the conditions and opportunities. We had to make a decision and settle down as soon as we possibly could. We had friends who had previously made it over to Canada, so we spoke to them on the phone and asked for their advice. After listening to their experience, we were convinced that this would make the most sense for our family. All right, it was set, we had made our decision: we were going to Canada. But how were we going to go about doing that with a tiny baby in our arms? Again, we turned to our friends who had gone down the same path for advice. A new adventure awaited us and we were on the road once again. We went from Washington Dulles to Boston and from there to Plattsburgh on a tiny plane for twenty passengers. We were told that this was the closest point to the Canadian border. This was the road leading to Montreal. The plane was tiny, and as soon as we landed, the small group of passengers scattered off so quickly, and we were left standing there, dumbstruck. There was no one around, not even in the airport — including employees. It felt almost like a ghost town..

At the airport exit we called up a taxi and gave the driver the address of the hotel where we'd booked ourselves a room ahead of time. The driver was a

woman; she must've sensed something by our uneasiness and the way we looked around at everything all open-eyed and in wonder, because she handed over her number and said, "If you need to go to the border I can take you." There was no kidding that we were obviously on edge... There were so many voices going off in our brains: "If the police yells at us to stop, we definitely have to stop.. What if they don't let us in?! It's freezing outside, what if we freeze to death, is that possible? Let's say we make it, how about our baby, will he be able to resist the cold? There's no one around here, what if somebody kidnaps us, will anyone find out?" Questions, questions...

On the one hand, we were dreaming of starting a new life; but, on the other hand, we were terrified out of our minds. We stayed at the hotel for one night. We decided to not think about anything anymore that night. We ordered a pizza, took a hot shower and tried to relax. Whether we liked it or not, we had set out on a quest, and we had no other choice than to continue on and keep praying for God to help us along the way.

We woke up early the next morning and set out on the road. We called up a taxi — not the lady from the night before but another one. We loaded up our stuff and drove to the border on Roxham Road. It was January 23, 2017. A cold, cold morning... Us, carrying the uneasiness and the low feeling not knowing what was in store for us at our next step forward. The taxi driver must have sensed it, too, for he felt the need to comfort us. "Don't be afraid, and don't be shy. This is your God-given right," he said.

...

We got out of the taxi still feeling the same uneasiness. We had only taken a few steps when two police officers approached us. One of them, in fact, helped us carry our bags. We were trying to keep cool so they wouldn't notice anything out of the ordinary, or so we thought. But, as it turns out, they had already figured out why we were there as they escorted us inside.

## *“Are You Sure?!”*

After we had been escorted inside a container-style police station type place — which was where the people seeking asylum were received — we were asked this question: "Are you sure? You are hereby under custody. Are you sure that you wish to seek asylum?" Yes, we were sure... We had been forced to become so sure of such a thing... We, the scapegoat of Erdogan regime. own country, had been pushed to go begging for democracy from another country, to go seeking for our God-given right of freedom in other countries. This was the case, whether we liked it or not...

Our phones and all other belongings — except for the baby's — were taken from us, and we had to wait a half hour as everything was searched and examined one by one. Afterwards, we boarded the yellow buses — together with the other asylum seekers — and we were taken to another small police station. We waited for 4-5 hours inside another container building. After all the waiting we had to do that day, now whenever I witness any snowy or icy weather, I immediately remember that exact day. Because we had been the last to arrive, we ended up being the ones who waited there the longest. Everyone waiting in the container with us eventually went out, one by one, until we were the last ones left. In the end, they took a testimony only from my husband, and then we were transferred to the third stop of our asylum seeking adventure — another border police station. There we were offered some food for the first time. After going hungry for so long, we gobbled up the applesauce and sandwich they gave us in a matter of seconds. “Did we want to call anyone?” Of course we did. I called my mother right away and gave her the good news

she had been waiting for. We were safe, we were fine, we were within the borders of a free country. What followed afterwards were a set of routine procedures — finger prints, photographs, signatures, and a whole lot of forms to fill out.

Because the procedures we had to spend the night there. We were taken into a big room and made to wait. When it was nighttime the table and chairs were folded up, and we were given blankets. Everyone had to sleep lying on the floor, but they did provide us with a portable bed for our baby. It was freezing cold throughout the night. As more and more asylum seekers came one after the other, the room kept on getting more crowded, and the night we spent there turned out to be pretty rough.

So many different kinds of people... people fleeing from war/persecution, fearful children, families whose fear and uncertainty could be read in their eyes.. A feeling of relief and thoughts of, "I'm in a good place now;" and on the other hand, hearts trembling with worries of, "What now?" So many people in the same situation... I could understand what each of them were going through... I could understand because we were going through the same experience.

...

Towards noon the next day my husband and I were taken in separately to give our testimonies and, then once more we were boarded onto buses — this time on our way to Montreal. We were taken to a refugee shelter at the local YMCA.



## *A New Life...*

As I look back at those days now, I think to myself, “A whole year has passed by. It was last year January 24... it has now been a full year since we left behind our social status, our families, our properties, our assets, and of course the ‘terrorist’ label that had been thrown on us, not to mention our pride and our egos.. we left it all behind and came to this new world...”

And now Canada had gifted us with a new baby, a little bit of hope but, naturally, a whole lot of difficulty. My husband, while working in the order delivery business on the side, is also preparing for the exams in order to be able to start his PhD studies at the university in the field of epidemiology. I, on the other hand, though it's definitely not my style, have settled in the home as a homemaker and mother and am raising my two children. Life itself is a world of tests and no matter where you are, even though the contents may change, the fundamental characteristic stays pretty much the same. I think what's truly essential is being able to consent to your destiny... It's all a part of the Master Plan, is it not...

Right now we are unable to carry out our professions; our diplomas are accredited but that's not all there is to it. We have to pass certain exams, and the quotas are so limited. Each exam costs a substantial amount of money. I'm not complaining; rather, I'm merely describing our situation. In the end, the reason we came here was not to carry out our profession but to be able to live our lives as human beings and in peace. The notion of one day being able to

to return to our professions will continue to chatter on inside our hearts and minds, keeping us full of hope that one day it might be possible...

...

If someone were to ask me, "Have you been able to adapt?" I would answer, "We do not belong here in the first place," because the conditions we find ourselves in make us feel that way, all the way to our core. From financial problems, to not being able to sufficiently express ourselves, to simply the fact of being a refugee in this country — all of these are things that wound a person's self esteem .

"Would I want to return eventually?" Both yes, and no. I would because both my husband and I were successful individuals in our area of expertise. However, the slander that certain people who have some kind of connection with the Hizmet Movement and who have made it up to certain positions in their careers have gotten there, "Because they cheated their way through the exams," continues to label us like a piece of rot. I believe that one day justice will work its way into our country, and our careers and all that have been taken away from us will be returned once again. And so, I would want to return in order to be able to witness the cleansing of this dirt that's been thrown on us.

And I would not because the people who we idolized in our minds and hearts as being nearly angel-like, describing them as "The People of Anatolia," after seeing how judgmental and merciless they could be, even the slightest thought of this kind of persecution recurring ever again runs a chill down my spine, it terrifies me. I hope and I pray that our fate holds a bright future for us in our new country.

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Storyteller: Dr. Rana  
Scenarist: Mina Leila

# THE BABY IN THE SUITCASE

*"How enchanting are you o visage of freedom,  
We are free of captivity, yet captivated by your love."*

*Namik Kemal*

We are all travelers towards an unknown... We've fallen in love with an ideal that gives a promise of the eternal. An ideal that will reveal the unknown and enlighten the uncertain... An ideal that is sacred like the bread, valued like a promise, indispensable like freedom..

Every person is on a journey that is unique to themselves... But an ideal that is so great, a dream that is so boundless brings with it a journey that is far from easy. It brings with it a path that is ridden with deep pitfalls... A journey that is washed with floods and blocked by avalanches... A journey with no refreshing breeze... A path that is ruled by thunderstorms...

In the middle of this endless wilderness, we have no choice but to keep on moving forward... be it on foot... even barefoot maybe... walking over burning sand...

Be it on horse... bareback and unsaddled maybe... we have no choice but to gallop on, day and night, until we reach our destination...

Be it by plane... all alone, with no mother, no father by our side maybe... we have no choice but to cross over countries and continents, doing our best to hide our tears...

Be it inside a suitcase... uncomfortable as it may be... we have no choice but to cross over borders with the hushed silence of a baby, oblivious to all that is happening around us, just so that we may be able to say, "Yes, the world is my home."...

Roads turn into roads... minutes turn into hours... lives grow old... yet the state of a traveler, the nature of a voyager does not change. Ever so real, ever so fresh, just like the first day...

Each one of us holds a special role in this "journey" scenario... Be it by force, or by favor, we all take up our positions on the stage of life.

Ms. Rana, she was given the role to walk a rainy stage, on a snowy path against the bitter wind. With the strength she gathered from being a mother, from being a woman and being a wife, she was able to do justice to and make the most of her scene. And now, once again, she is on the verge of yet another tough journey as she sets out to enlighten the "uncertain" lying ahead...

